R E P O R T R E S U M E S

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THE RATIONALE FOR A SYSTEM-WIDE READING COMMITTEE.

BY- NEWTON, J. ROY

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THE ROLE OF COMMITTEES DEVOTED TO THE IMPROVEMENT AND COORDINATION OF READING INSTRUCTION IS BEING DEFINED AS READING COMMITTEES ARE CREATED IN MANY SCHOOLS. AMONG THE FUNCTIONS OF A READING COMMITTEE ARE THE FOLLOWING--(1) TO EMPHASIZE THE WHOLE-SCHOOL NATURE OF THE READING PROGRAM, (2) TO INCREASE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF READING PERSONNEL, (3) TO PROVIDE CHANNELS FOR THE DISSEMINATION OF IDEAS, PRACTICES, AND TECHNIQUES, (4) TO AID INSERVICE WORK IN ALL GRADES, AND (5) TO EXPEDITE DOING WHAT HAS TO BE DONE. THE STRENGTH OF A READING COMMITTEE DEPENDS ON ITS REPRESENTATION--CLASSROOM TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS, SUPERVISORY PERSONNEL, READING-RELATED SERVICES PERSONNEL, AND LAYMEN FROM THE COMMUNITY. A WIDE REPRESENTATION IS ADVISABLE AND COULD BE ORGANIZED BY GRADE LEVELS, BY PRIMARY-INTERMEDIATE AND JUNIOR HIGH-SENIOR HIGH DIVISIONS, AND BY ADMINISTRATIVE OR DEPARTMENTAL DIVISIONS. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ADVISORY COUNCIL TO SERVE AS THE PLANNING COMMITTEE IS RECOMMENDED. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (SEATTLE, MAY 4-6, 1967). (NS)

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J. Roy Newton, Chairman
Reading Department
School of Education
State University of New York at Albany
1223 Western Avenue
Albany, New York 12203

IRA

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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The Rationale for a System-Wide Reading Committee

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Before we can determine what may be accomplished through the use of this committee, we must first determine what constitutes a Reading Committee. Many variations are possible depending upon the size of the school system and the existence of other committees.

The membership of the Reading Committee probably should include, at the elementary level, a representative from each grade with additional members if more than one school is involved. The middle school, where it exists, might have similar representation. At the

secondary level the committee should involve someone from each subject area including the so-called "non-academic" subjects. This may well be the chairman of the department although in some cases, at least, a stronger committee may result if representation of a department is delegated to a teacher who is "sold" on the importance of reading. In addition, teachers of Language Arts at all grade levels might be invited to belong. Intermediate grades and middle schools having departmentalization will tend to reflect the organization pattern suggested for the secondary school. To the above representation of classroom teachers should be added principals and supervisory personnel. This inclusion of the administration is vital to the success of the reading program. Reading related services such as the school psychologist, guidance counselor, school nurse-teacher, librarians and audio-visual director should be added. At times, the Reading Committee may wish to include, for a specific meeting or series of meetings, lay people from the local community. Boys and girls, parents and members of the medical profession have contributions to make.

Obviously the strength of such a committee lies in the wideness of its representation. Equally obvious should be that its size is at the same time a possible cause of weakness. However, only rarely will the entire Reading Committee need to meet as when contemplating the evaluation of a whole-school reading

program, or planning workshops, conferences, or in-service training programs. At other times a more effective organization is by a given grade, by primary, intermediate, junior, or senior high divisions, by supervisory and/or administrative personnel, or by departments.

The structure of the Reading Committee may be completed by the establishment of an advisory council which, itself, may serve as a planning committee. Important points to consider are those involving flexibility. Careful planning will avoid such pitfalls as unnecessary attendance at large meetings involving minutia of little concern to the majority of those in attendance. By careful planning, also, the Reading Committee will be able to focus attention relatively quickly upon those areas of the reading program which may be in need of immediate attention.

So much for the "what" of the Reading Committee. The next question to be answered is the one, "Why is a Reading Committee necessary?" Despite concern voiced in may quarters that change in reading procedures is relatively slowly accomplished, we have made considerable progress in the last ten or fifteen years. A few years ago a school administrator often felt he had "solved" the reading problems in his school by the hiring of a remedial teacher. This teacher was expected to work almost entirely with all the problem readers leaving the other teachers to go about

their business of teaching. This philosophy had the effect of placing reading instruction on a treadmill. The reading teacher had to work faster, with larger groups, as more and more boys and girls were found to be in need of help. Emphasis was on correction rather than prevention.

Now schools are seeing that the professionally competent reading specialist is fully as important as are directors of curriculum and of instruction. The emphasis is shifting slowly but steadily from working with children to working with teachers -- classroom teachers. Clinical work must be continued by highly trained technicians. However, the long term view, most productive in improving learning situations and hence involving preventive work, is in this area of improving instruction in the classroom.

Many school systems are taking advantage of the availability of ESEA funds to augment existing in-service programs. Special attention should be devoted to first-year and non-tenure teachers. As efforts are made to improve the quality and the amount of reading instruction in our teacher-training colleges, we must coordinate pre-service and in-service experience. No matter how good we can make our pre-service courses, an effective program demands the continuation of the professional training of teachers on an in-service basis. The Reading Committee appears to be a logical way of accomplishing this coordination in the area of reading instruction.

The concept of a committee devoted to the improvement and coordination of reading instruction is not new. In 1954, Simpson suggested the formation of such a committee in connection with the improvement of reading skills among high school students. When Newton enlarged the suggestion to include the whole school in 1960, the idea was criticized as being both impractical and Utopian. In 1965, Robinson and Rauch indicate that schools are finding the Reading Committee to be a businesslike way of going about a job that is long overdue.

One more point must be accepted. It is about time classroom teachers, reading related services, administrators and the lay public acknowledge the fact that reading is so important to learning that the organization of the whole-school reading program be recognized as the responsibility of the competent reading specialist. The forward-looking administrator will delegate this responsibility while giving it his whole-hearted support.

In this atmosphere, the Reading Committee is expected to function in the following ways as it:

1. Emphasizes the whole-school nature of the reading program.
2. Increases the effectiveness of reading personnel.
3. Unites, or helps unite, a school faculty.

4. Presents a structured organization that is flexible, efficient and workable.
5. Provides channels for the dissemination of ideas, practices and techniques.
6. Educates through involvement.
7. Aids in-service work in all areas.
8. Systematizes efficient operation.
9. Facilitates working closely with college personnel.
10. Expedites doing what has to be done.

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